NEW SETTLEMENTS

A HISTORY OF BAR HILL

Contents:

2. Policy Background
3. The Scheme
4. Early Development
5. Development from 1976
6. Later Development

MR/jw October 1985

MR SPR BHill

CAMBRIDGE 705MA RECEIVED

2. POLICY BACKGROUND

2.1 The 1952 County Development Plan sought to contain growth within the City of Cambridge and limit its population to 100,000. Industrial development was also restricted. To complement this strategy, growth was directed to a ring of key villages around Cambridge; each planned to grow to a population of 7,500. Other larger villages in the rural area outside this ring were also encouraged to grow and form individual rural service centres.

2.2 This strategy proved more successful than was originally envisaged. The Key Villages grew at a much faster rate than that expected. Their target population of 25,000 in total was reached in 1964, rather than the planned date of 1971. There was increasing concern that the character of these villages was under threat if they were allowed to expand further. In order to relieve this pressure, the Revised County Strategy placed a greater emphasis on settlements outside the ring, in the rural area to expand. Also, the idea of developing six completely new villages in the rural area was floated.

2.3 New village sites had to meet three basic criteria: single ownership; marketable location; and well related to the existing development pattern. The site at Bar Hill Farm met all these criteria and became the first location to be proposed. The remaining five sites were never developed and their location never revealed. As the County Planning Authority had no powers of compulsory purchase, they had to secure an agreement with the owner of Bar Hill Farm to sell to the company preferred by the Local Authority. Originally the purchase price was to be based on an assessment of a fair residual value of the land with planning potential. In the event, the developers had to pay above this price as a change in County Council opinion meant that nothing less than residential value for the site should be paid.

2.4 The site was first offered to Walls, Hickman and Partners who considered the scheme uneconomic. The County then offered the site to SPAN developers but they chose a site in Kent, now New Ash Green. Finally, in 1961, Holland Harmen and Cubitts agreed to act as contractors and developers for the new village. The company were responsible for schemes such as County Hall and the Royal Festival Hall in London and were just beginning to break into the large scale residential market. The site was purchased by Cubitts in 1963 at a cost of £400 per acre, £140,000 in total.

2.5 Following a public local inquiry, outline planning permission was granted although the Inspector placed fewer conditions on the approval than the County wished. The result of this was that agreements providing facilities in Bar Hill proceeded on the assurance from the developers to comply with the Authority's wishes rather than by contractual liability. Detailed consent for phase one was granted in 1965 and work began in November of that year. It was thought that the development would take eight years to complete.

3. THE SCHEME

3.1 The village was designed by Covell Mathews and Partners who proposed a scheme of 1,250 houses, shopping and social facilities and a light industrial estate along the Radburn design principle of segregating vehicular and pedestrian flows. The total cost of the project was estimated at £8m. The village was to be built entirely by the private sector so that the County could secure contributions from the developers to the cost of village infrastructure and services.

3.2 It is estimated that the developer costs of providing external services, which included sewers, water main, access road and a bridge amounted to £220,000. On site investment included provision of a green buffer zone around the village and the provision of service sites for community use, school, shops and industry. Further overhead costs related to the design of the scheme itself. Using the Radburn principle, significant extra costs were created, for example, extensive landscaping and the need for a perimeter road around the village. It is estimated that on site costs totalled £300,000. Thus with the cost of land purchase added, the developers faced a bill totalling £660,000.

3.3 Developer costs of this nature had to be recouped from profits made on house sales. The need to price houses competitively however to ensure continued cash flows proved a problem for Cubitts and it is likely that these two factors: high on-site costs and the need to keep prices low, put a substantial squeeze on their margins of profit. How much contribution to servicing costs was finally made by Cubitts is not known.

3.4 Houses in Bar Hill were initially sold on a 150 year leasehold. This was intended as a means to preserve the facilities of the village by reverting its ownership to a Trust made up of village residents after the leases had expired. The Trust was to be set up to independently oversee management matters within the village and maintain community facilities. Originally it was to be financed through a contribution from each resident as part of the ground rent.

4. EARLY DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Before the first houses were begun, the developers faced some significant hold-ups. Originally, it was intended that a sewerage works for the village would be constructed nearby but the proposed site was not released by the County Council's Smallholding Committee as they had another use for it. Cubitts attempted to negotiate a joint scheme with Oakington and Dry Drayton Parish Councils but found them unco-operative, despite their offer to meet two thirds of the cost. Hence initial developer costs were increased as Cubitts had to purchase additional land for the works and finance its construction themselves. It also held up development which gave the scheme a bad image in the public eye.

4.2 The first houses in Phase One were finally started in 1966. This first phase involved permission for 137 houses, along with some shopping and industrial development. The early development strategy has been criticised for being too rigid in its approach. For example, construction of the village centre did not keep up with house construction which led to early residents lacking essential services. This labelled Bar Hill as a "village without a heart". Also, the second phase was developed in isolation from the first thus resulting in a disjointed pattern of development.

4.3 In 1969, Cubitts, after having constructed less than 100 dwellings in the first phase decided to sell the village completely. The reasons behind this decision remain unclear though it is probable that the company was in financial difficulties. It may well have been that the contributions required for on-site costs and the need to maintain competitive house prices proved too great a burden for the company and contributed to their financial problems. Initial developer costs were inflated due to unforeseen problems. As well as the sewerage problems mentioned above, stormwater provision proved to be inadequate which required more land to be purchased. Initial house sales were slow which reflected the poor market attraction of north Cambridge at this time and also the fact that the Estate Agents dealing with Bar Hill were based in London and not local. It is probably therefore that the low early returns on a substantial investment by the developers forced them to sell the site.

4.3 The purchaser of Bar Hill was the Ideal Building Corporation, part of the Trafalgar House group of companies. A separate company, Bar Hill Developments Ltd, was formed to take over development of the village. A subsidiary of Ideal, the Nun Corporation took on housing construction completing phase one and started phase two. The Corporation imposed some significant changes in the development. The type of houses constructed were changed to more conventional, cheaper designs in order to appeal to a wider market. This has led to criticism in that the design standards imposed by the original masterplan were being overlooked. An example of this was the Fairway housing scheme allowed outside the perimeter road which reduced space for essential landscaping. The Fairway scheme did provide large freehold plots giving an opportunity for self-build and a further diversification of housing type. As the size of plots were quite large, the houses built were invariably up market dwellings, something which the village generally lacked.

4.4 The previously agreed commitments from the developers to provide village facilities were lost in the change of ownership. Thus the original concept of the development was seriously undermined. An example of the problems caused was the delay in the construction of the A604 flyover.

Originally in 1965, Cubitts were to contribute to the cost of these works which was seen as a vital link in expanding the village to its final population. The construction of the junction was held up however due to uncertainty over the proposed route of the M11 motorway and the exact date of the A604 dualling. The Planning Authority placed a limit of 200 houses on Bar Hill until the junction was improved. They were forced to extend this limit to 400 then to 600 until the flyover was eventually developed in 1978 at public cost. Once again, Bar Hill suffered from bad publicity due to these delays.

4.6 Ideal Homes and the Nun Corporation were the sole housing developers at Bar Hill from 1969 to 1974. This produced a very slow rate of housing completions and other development, particularly shopping provision, lagged behind. In 1974, Nun Corporation went into liquidation and housing construction came to a complete standstill throughout 1974 and 1975. due to this, the village gained a poor reputation with both consumers and building societies alike. From 1976 onwards, however, the situation was changed by a combination of factors.

5. DEVELOPMENT FROM 1976

5.1 The first factor to improve the situation at Bar Hill was the production of a local plan for the village. This plan attempted to bring the development under control by re-defining its final population from 5,000 to 4,500 and by re-stating design standards to ensure that future development was of a quality similar to that produced in the early years by Cubitts. By 1976, 600 of the planned 1,250 houses were completed.

5.2 The local plan also increased warehousing provision in the village, though this was dependent on the completion of the A604 flyover. Land allocated for this purpose amounted to 31 acres. A further 20,000 ft² of office floorspace was also allowed. This was aimed at reducing the amount of daily out-commuting from the village and create a more inward-motivated community.

5.3 The village Trust, the body envisaged to take on the running of Bar Hill was never set up due to changes imposed by the Leasehold Reform Act 1967. This Act allowed leaseholders to extend their leases and hence put the possibility of reverting ownership of the site to the Trust in jeopardy. Also householders were allowed to purchase the freehold of their property which removed the ground rent income of the Trust. There was provision in the local plan, therefore, to enable the Parish Council to take over the functions of the Trust, and provide necessary maintenance and promotion of the community. The village hall, proposed in the original plan, was yet to be constructed as no finance was available for such development.

5.4 The interest of Tesco at Bar Hill was the second factor which helped save the new village from failure. By 1976, provision of shopping floorspace was lagging behind planned targets. Only 21,000 ft² of the projected 60,000 ft² had been taken up. The remaining area lay vacant. The one supermarket in the centre, Key Markets, had closed due to rationalisation within the company. It is perhaps symbolic that the sliding roof over the shopping mall never opened due to poor design. Perhaps the sun was never destined to shine on Bar Hill village centre!

5.5 At this time, however, Tesco were looking to establish themselves in the Cambridge area and Bar Hill, with an existing catchment population and space to develop and expand, offered an optimum out of town location. Outline permission for a superstore was granted in 1976 and shopping floorspace totals were therefore satisfied. The store was completed and opened in 1977. Tesco also brought a petrol filling station to the village and purchased the whole central shopping area including the pub. With this in their ownership, they were able to place embargos on which shops were allowed to operate in order to protect their own interests, but at the same time, maintain the shopping mall as a viable village centre. Tesco have since become well established in Bar Hill and the superstore has maintained high profit margins. The store was extended in 1983 by 23,640 ft² and a garden centre added.

5.6 Despite the difficulties in forming a village Trust to control the village, the Bar Hill community did eventually become more organised, though not to the extent originally planned by Cubitts. The construction of a village hall was realised in 1980 and a committee of residents set up to run it. Funds for the hall were raised through private initiative and donations, and has since provided a focus for local events and meetings. The village has developed an active community of its own despite the lack of an organised framework to govern the village.

6. LATER DEVELOPMENT

6.1 Throughout the 1970's, housing was completed at a slow annual rate as only one company, Ideal Homes, was involved in its construction. In 1979 Bar Hill Developments Ltd decided to sell off some of the remaining land parcels to volume house-builders and with their involvement from 1980, housing construction was speeded up.

PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSE COMPLETIONS - BAR HILL

1975 -	0
1976 -	42
1977 -	62
1978 -	35
1979 -	34
1980 -	58
1981 -	44
1982 -	85
1983 -	120
1984 -	245

SOURCE: Monitoring Statistics

6.2 Parcels of land were sold to Bovis, Wilcon and Wimpey. Ideal Homes continued to build themselves. At the end of 1984, there remained 387 unimplemented permissions of which 134 were under construction. Wimpey have completed phase 4 of Bar Hill whilst most other phases are nearing completion. Phase 9 and 10 owned by Wilcon Homes have an estimated 3 years of development before completion.

6.3 Whilst the advantages of involving several companies in housebuilding can be gauged in the faster completion rate, there is an alternative view that volume house-builders have spoilt the environmental quality of Bar Hill by their off-the-peg approach to house design. It appears that innovative and original designs identified with the early development at Bar Hill have been sacrificed in the need to speed up and complete the development. It is probably fair to say, however, that the recent standard of development has not been as low as that of the early 1970's

6.4 On the industrial side, land take up has been steady. In June 1985, there remained 6 units vacant, from a total of 56. Bar Hill has attracted a variety of firms from abroad, other parts of the UK and from more local companies wishing to expand within the area. The majority of the latest lets have been to firms of a technological basis, for example, Spectronic Micro Systems arriving in 1981. Although it cannot be argued that the provision of employment sites in Bar Hill has made the village economically independent, the development of industrial uses in tandem with residential and commercial has set Bar Hill apart as a unique development in Cambridgeshire.